

Oncology nurses play a key role in supporting caregivers through education and training in both inpatient and outpatient settings. This article describes the learning preferences of informal caregivers of adult care recipients. Caregiver respondents preferred multiple training methods, with most endorsing in-person instruction, online video instruction, and reading materials.

AT A GLANCE

- Caregivers are often underprepared for the care they provide.
- Oncology nurses have been known as trusted sources of information and education for patients and caregivers.
- Efforts should be undertaken to extend learning beyond clinical encounters and consider caregiver preferences in learning.

KEYWORDS

caregivers; oncology nurses; learning preferences; education; training

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Caregiver Education and Training

Learning preferences of informal caregivers of adult care recipients

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More than 53 million Americans are estimated to be providing care for an individual with a health problem or functional needs, and this number is increasing (AARP & National Alliance for Caregiving, 2020). About 6% of the U.S. population, or 3.18 million individuals, provides care for an individual whose main health condition is cancer (AARP & National Alliance for Caregiving, 2020; Hunt et al., 2016). Informal caregivers provide direct care that is essential to their loved ones, including performing clinical care tasks, communicating with healthcare professionals, assisting with activities of daily living, and providing psychosocial support. Both the growing cancer incidence (American Cancer Society, 2020) and an increasing shift of care from inpatient hospital to home settings place greater burden on caregivers of patients with cancer. Research has shown that caregiver burden is associated with poorer outcomes in patients with cancer (Litzelman et al., 2016), suggesting that supporting caregivers alongside their care recipients is essential.

However, evidence suggests that caregivers often do not receive the training that they need (McCusker et al., 2018; Mollica et al., 2017; Van Ryn et al., 2011), particularly for clinical care tasks such

as managing symptoms, administering medication, and performing tasks (e.g., changing bandages). This can be consequential for caregivers who may be underprepared to support their loved ones. In addition, lack of training and preparation is associated with lower self-efficacy and greater burden (Havvyer et al., 2017; Mollica et al., 2017).

Oncology nurses play a key role in supporting caregivers through education and training in both inpatient and outpatient settings. However, of note is that the growing population of caregivers is diverse in level of health literacy, ability to navigate technology, and ability to access supportive resources (AARP & National Alliance for Caregiving, 2020). As such, caregivers' preferences for how they learn may also vary. Prior research has shown that caregivers are interested in learning how to provide quality care (Wilkins et al., 2009), but there is a lack of information on caregiver preferences for learning mode and, thereby, what may be most effective.

Methods

The Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) is a nationally representative survey of adults in the United States (Hesse et al., 2017) that regularly collects information from the public on use and perceptions of health-related information, including cancer. HINTS collects the same core information to monitor changes in